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JANE DAWSON

The Fifth Earl of Argyle, Gaelic Lordship and Political Power in Sixteenth-century Scotland

In October 1565, after an impressive display of personal vigour and determination, Mary Queen of Scots brought the Chaseabout Raid to a triumphant conclusion. The opponents of the Queen's marriage to Darnley, led by her own half-brother Lord James Stewart, had been driven across the Border to an uncomfortable exile in England. The only rebel to remain within Scotland was the fifth earl of Argyle, who had retreated into his own 'country' and was awaiting developments in his castle at Dunoon. Instead of pursuing him and forcing his submission, the king and queen abandoned the chase and went to Dumfries. No subsequent attempt was made to subdue or harass the earl, beyond a formal summons to appear before the privy council. The royal army had not dared to pursue Argyle and even a royal messenger was not safe when he entered Argyle's territory in the west. When Johnie Brand tried to deliver the summons he was seized and spent the following five months languishing in prison at Innischonnel.¹

The queen's seemingly casual attitude towards Argyle's open rebellion at the moment when her own power was at its zenith contrasted sharply with the fate of the earl of Huntly. When he had rebelled in 1562 the royal army had marched north and defeated the Gordons at Corrichie. The battle had led to the death of Huntly himself, the execution of his son and the humbling of the whole Gordon kin.² In 1565, however, the Campbells not only escaped royal retribution; they also emerged relatively unscathed from the civil war between the king's and the queen's parties which was fought between 1567

1 At least Johnie Brand was paid for the 156 days he spent in prison: *Accounts of the Lord Treasurer of Scotland [TA]*, edd. T. Dickson and Sir J. Balfour Paul (Edinburgh, 1877–1916), xi, lxxvi, 495. For the background to the Chaseabout Raid see the author's article, 'Mary Queen of Scots, Lord Darnley, and Anglo-Scottish Relations', *International History Review*, viii (1986), 1–24.

2 G. Donaldson, *James V–VII* (Edinburgh, 1971 ed.), 1111–12.

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and 1573. Unlike the poor Hamiltons whose fortunes were seriously impaired by the forfeitures after the defeat of the queen's party at Langside in 1568, the Campbells were virtually untouched.¹ Indeed Argyle was actually rewarded. At the end of the hostilities in 1573 the earl was given the chancellorship, the highest office in the state, as the price of his reconciliation and composition with the regent's government.²

What made the earl of Argyle so different that in 1565 the victorious queen did not even try to attack him? Why did such royal behaviour, which would have been unthinkable towards any other Scottish magnate, excite very little comment at the time? A superficial survey of Argyle's career provides few clues as to why he should have been treated with unique leniency. The fifth earl, who had succeeded to the title in 1558, was, like his father before him, a firm Protestant. From the First Band of 1557 he had supported the Lords of the Congregation and played an important part in the wars to expel the French and in the subsequent Reformation. On Mary's return to her native Scotland he had remained in favour at court, forming a close friendship with the queen, who was also his sister-in-law. Argyle's protestantism, his family interests and his support of the English alliance had all led him to oppose Mary's marriage to Darnley and, as has been seen, he took the rebel side in the Chase-about Raid. He subsequently opposed the queen's marriage to Bothwell and acquiesced in her abdication. His doubts about the propriety and legality of Mary's removal led him to transfer his allegiance to the queen's party and he remained one of its leaders throughout the civil war. He died suddenly in 1573 having just been made chancellor and seemingly at the peak of his power.³

This brief summary of Argyle's career appears remarkably similar to that of most of the other leading Scottish magnates of the period,

1 Very few Campbells were called in front of the privy council after the Chase-about Raid (*The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland [RPC]*, edd J. H. Burton and others (Edinburgh, 1877-), i, 377) or were escheated after Langside (*Registrum Secreti Sigilli, Regum Scotorum [RSS]*, edd. M. Livingstone and others (Edinburgh, 1908-), vi, nos. 380; 1027 and compare with the index under Langside). The only part of Argyle's territory or affinity which the central government could distrain was the Lowland properties around Castle Campbell and Dollar. (*TA* xii, 133-4). For the Hamiltons: E. Finnie, 'The House of Hamilton: Patronage, Politics and the Church in the Reformation Period', *The Innes Review* (1950-), 36 (1985), 3-28.

2 Grant of Chancellorship, 17 January 1573, *Reports of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts [HMC]*, (London, 1870-), 4th report, 486; G. Donaldson, *All the Queen's Men* (London, 1983), 127.

3 This kind of summary of Argyle's career can be found in the standard references such as *The Scots Peerage*, [*Scots Peerage*], ed. Sir J. Balfour Paul (Edinburgh, 1904-14), i, 340-44. For a rather different picture of the fifth earl's activities: J. Dawson, 'Two Kingdoms or Three: Ireland in Anglo-Scottish Relations in the Mid-Sixteenth Century', in *Scotland and England 1286-1815*, R. Mason (ed.), (Edinburgh, 1987), 113-38.

like the earls of Moray, Mar, Morton, Atholl or Huntly or of Maitland of Lethington. It does not explain why Argyle was different from his contemporaries. The answer to that question lies in the unique nature of the earl's power and the way in which it rendered him impregnable within his own 'country'.

I

Argyle was set apart from the other Scottish magnates by the scale of the military and naval forces which he could command. This formidable military establishment was the visible dimension of his special power. It made him the most important source of military might within the British Isles outwith the governments of Scotland and England.¹ Even in relation to the resources of the state, the forces at Argyle's command were impressive: in 1560 the earl was offering to the English government 3,000 men, which was twice the size of the English army then stationed in Ireland.²

The earl's main asset was his fighting men who provided the core of his military strength. These soldiers were experienced warriors who had fought in the forays and battles of the Scottish Highlands. Most of them had also been mercenary troops in Ireland either on long-term contracts as gallowglasses or on seasonal hire as redshanks.³ Argyle was able to raise at least 5,000 of these men and probably more in a real emergency.⁴ Such numbers were exceptional within the British Isles, far exceeding any other private army and rivalling

¹ In 1559, for example, the other Lords of the Congregation waited until Argyle could join them before they dared to begin any military operations: *The Scottish Correspondence of Mary of Lorraine* [*Mary of Lorraine Corresp.*] (SHS, 1927), 426–7.

² Public Record Office [*PRO*] SP 63/2 fos 58–60.

³ G. Hayes-McCoy, *Scots Mercenary Forces in Ireland (1565–1603)* (London, 1937). In particular, Argyle had 500 troops billeted in Tyrconnell at Calvagh O'Donnell's expense: Contract between O'Donnell and 4th earl of Argyle made in 1555 and renewed with 5th earl in 1560; Gaelic text printed *Scottish Gaelic Studies* [*SGS*], (1926–), vii (1953), 94–102; contemporary Scots version in *Highland Papers*, ed. J. R. N. Macphail (SHS, 1913–34) iv, 212–6.

⁴ These numbers are based on a series of estimates of the troops which the earls of Argyle put into the field in the 1540s–1570s: they ranged up to 7,000 men. *Calendar of the State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547–1603* [*CSP Scot*] ed. J. Bain and others (Edinburgh, 1898–), i, 9, 63, 100, 370, 480; ii, 152, 393, 406, 516; iv, 220; *The History of the Kirk in Scotland by Mr David Calderwood* Wodrow Society (Edinburgh, 1842), ii, 168; iii, 424. An example of the way extra troops could be raised in the area of Campbell dominance can be found in the plan to send 600 men to serve in the French wars in 1552: *Mary of Lorraine Corresp.*, 363–4.

the forces which could be easily raised by the crowns of Scotland or England. The Highland soldiers were well equipped in the gallowglass manner with their special armour, double-handed swords or bows.¹ The one drawback about Argyle's large army was that it fought predominantly on foot and contained few cavalry. In the rough terrain of the Highlands or in Ireland this was usually an advantage, but within the Lowlands of Scotland it could be a serious military disability. Although the lack of cavalry could create tactical difficulties, it did not impair the mobility of Argyle's army. In Ireland and the West of Scotland the problem of transport was solved by the use of galleys: Argyle's forces had a mobility and a capacity to mount combined operations that were extremely unusual within the context of sixteenth-century warfare. These galleys had immense advantages over conventional land transport as their shallow draughts and their use both of sails and oars gave them exceptional manoeuvrability and allowed access to all the Western coasts. In addition the speed and secrecy with which they could operate gave an element of surprise which would have been impossible with an overland expedition. As well as being the most efficient form of transport in the west the galleys were themselves a formidable fighting force since they were packed with armed men.²

In order to supply him with galleys Argyle had at least two resident families of shipwrights working for him, one based at Loch Awe and the other at Loch Fyne.³ To supplement his own fleet the earl could call upon those of his kin, friends and allies since virtually all the West Highland chiefs possessed their own galleys. Argyle's fleet also contained merchant ships lent by friendly ports: both in 1555 and in 1559 Ayr had supplied a ship at their own expense.⁴ Not infrequently the obligation of a subordinate to provide troops for the hosting was transmuted into the duty to fit out and man war galleys, so that the earl could mobilise ships at the same time as he raised his men. In the west of Scotland and the Isles where the old traditions were still strong the two operations went together naturally and the type of

1 D. Caldwell, *Scottish Weapons and Fortifications* (Edinburgh, 1981), 253–314; *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands*, K. Steer and J. Bannerman (edd.), (Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments, 1977), 167–73.

2 J. MacInnes, "West Highland Sea Power", *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* [TGSi], (Inverness, 1871–), xlviii (1972–4), 518–56.

3 The family of MacGille Chonaill was at Lochawe and MacLucais on Loch Fyne. The galleys were one of the glories of Campbell power and were celebrated in the poem, 'An Duanag Ullamh', *Bardachd Ghaidhlig* W. Watson (ed.), (Inverness, 1976 ed.), 259–62, lines, 6887–6910. In 1569 Argyle issued a proclamation from Largs calling upon all men between 16–60 to assist him against the Queen's enemies by building galleys: MacInnes, 'Sea Power', 527, 531.

4 *Ayr Burgh Accounts* 1534–1624, ed. G. S. Pryde (SHS, 1937), 122, 130.

warfare which resulted made galleys indispensable throughout the Highlands and Ulster.¹ If at any one time there were not enough galleys to hand, then Argyle could commandeer the Clyde herring boats to transport his troops, as happened in August 1568 when 2,000 men were carried to Glasgow in this way.²

The navy at Argyle's disposal was an important source of his strength. With it he had access to all the western seas from the Outer Hebrides to the Bristol Channel and frequently controlled large areas within this zone. In particular he could dominate the waters between Scotland and Ireland. There was no other naval presence in the west for the Tudor navy was all stationed in the east and south of England and the Scottish monarchs could call upon very few ships from the west coast apart from those under Argyle's control. The government in Ireland had very little naval support and even if the English crown did send the occasional squadron to assist the Dublin administration the ships were frequently of too deep draught to cope with the shallow sea lochs of northern Ireland and western Scotland where the galleys were supreme.³ Potentially, therefore, Argyle's navy threatened or protected the Scottish west coast, the Irish coast, north-west England and Wales as far south as the Bristol Channel. The greatest threat remained that to Ireland with the possibility of large numbers of troops being able to travel from the Isles or Scottish mainland within a day or two and land anywhere along the northern Irish coast. The galleys could pose such a severe threat that when the Dublin government heard that Argyle was constructing them in 1568 it prohibited the export of timber to Scotland in a vain attempt to prevent him reinforcing his navy.⁴

Argyle's sea-power gave his forces great mobility and the important element of surprise, but he also needed secure bases at home. Within his 'country' the earl and his allies occupied every major castle or fortification. All the theoretically 'royal' castles in the area were in his hands such as Dunstaffnage, Carrick, Castle Sween,

1 *HMC* (4th report), 473, 477. The whole question of the military tenure of the Western Highlands is a fascinating one: see the admirably clear discussions in *Acts of the Lords of the Isles* J. Munro and R. W. Munro (edd.), (SHS, 1986), xxxviii–xlii; A. R. Easson, 'Ouncelands and Pennylands in the Western Highlands', in *Ouncelands and Pennylands*, L. J. Macgregor and B. E. Crawford (edd.), (University of St. Andrews: St John's House Papers No. 3, 1987) 1–11. I am most grateful to Dr B. Crawford and Ms Anne Johnston for their help in unravelling this complicated issue.

2 *CSP Scot*, ii, 516.

3 T. Glasgow, 'The Elizabethan Navy in Ireland', *Irish Sword* xxix (1966), 291–309. The expedition mounted by the earl of Sussex in 1558 against the Scottish Isles and Kintyre failed to accomplish its objectives because the ships could not manoeuvre in the treacherous coastal waters: *Calendar of State Papers, Ireland [CSP Ireld.]*, i, 149–50, nos 70, 71, 75.

4 PRO, SP 63/25 fo 150.

Dunoon, Tarbert and Skipness. The Glenorchy Campbells seemed particularly interested in fortifying the areas under their control as was indicated by the nickname of the seventh laird: Black Duncan of the seven castles. By the middle of the sixteenth century they had moved from Kilchurn at the north end of Loch Awe, the original castle of Glenorchy, to Balloch castle at Taymouth and possessed several other fortified dwellings around Loch Tay. The Campbells of Craignish and Duntrune occupied the castles of those names and two close advisers of the fifth earl held important fortifications: Dougal MacDougall of Dunolly and John Stewart of Appin with castles Shuna and Stalker. This stranglehold over the castles of the area was one reason why it was so difficult for the Scottish government to contemplate an invasion of Argyle's 'country'.¹

In addition to fortifications to defend his own base Argyle had one further decisive advantage: he possessed the artillery to subdue the castles of his enemies. As large cannon were rare in the Highlands this gave the earl technological superiority: the medieval walls of most Scottish castles and houses were no match for the field guns that Argyle could turn against them. Like the Stewart kings, the earls of Argyle seem to have had a personal fondness for artillery and acquired cannon for themselves. On a number of occasions they loaned cannon to other lords,² the most famous being the so-called 'Crooked Gun' which accompanied the Campbell expedition to Tyrconnell in 1555 and ensured the success of the campaign against the castles held by Manus O'Donnell.³ The punitive expedition mounted the previous year and led by the fourth earl against John Moidart of Clanranald was probably successful precisely because Argyle was able to utilise his artillery. His forces attacked from the sea and pounded the walls of castle Tioram, Clanranald's stronghold. The combination of artillery and the sea power to transport it gave the earls of Argyle the potential to dominate the Isles by force.⁴

The possession and deployment of artillery by a magnate was so unusual that it aroused comment: early modern governments tried

1 *Reports of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments and Constructions of Scotland [Hist.MMS.Comm.]*, (Edinburgh, 1909–), (Argyll i–iii; the final volume covering Mid-Argyll and Cowal has not yet been published); M. Lindsay, *The Castles of Scotland* (London, 1986); N. Tranter, *The Fortified House in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1962–70); v: D. MacGibbon and T. Ross, *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland* (London, 1887–92), i–v. Gyle Castle on Kerrera built by Dougal MacDougall, though not completed until 1582, might also be included.

2 For example, Argyle sent cannon to the earl of Arran, *CSP Scot*, i, 480.

3 *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters* (Dublin, 1851), v, 1541; G. Hayes-McCoy, 'The early history of guns in Ireland', *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society* xviii (1938–9), 65, and below p. 7 n. 1.

4 For the Highland expedition: *T&A* x, xlvii–viii; 229, 287. There is archaeological evidence for the damage done to the castle by the cannon balls: Tranter, *The Fortified House*, 116.

and often succeeded to maintain a monopoly over the guns that were transforming warfare and especially sieges. In 1555 the English believed that the brass cannon brought to Ulster proved that the Campbell expedition had the support of the Scottish government.¹ The underlying assumption that no government would willingly permit its subjects to use important pieces of artillery (such as sophisticated brass cannon) in a totally independent fashion reveals the remarkable nature of Argyle's military power. It is significant that in his contract with Elizabeth I's government in July 1560 the fifth earl asked for some large English cannon in exchange for his troops.² If the fifth earl had received the cannon promised in the 1560 contract then he would have not only had a massive technological superiority over any other chief in the west but also a considerable military advantage within national Scottish politics and might have been able to dominate the crown itself. In military matters the earl was an independent prince owning the basic tools of state power.

Fighting men; artillery; castles and galleys made Argyle a formidable and independent military power, not merely in the context of the Highlands or even Scotland but of the British Isles as a whole. Although by continental standards the numbers which Argyle could put into the field were small, within the relatively unsophisticated military world of Britain they were of great significance. One of the undoubted advantages which this military might brought the earl of Argyle was a virtually impregnable defensive screen. With his manpower, castles and artillery it is hardly surprising that the Scottish government did not think seriously of attacking Argyle in his own 'country'. The Campbell saying 'It is a far cry to Loch Awe' held true for the Scottish government as well as those searching for Muriel the heiress of Cawdor!

II

If Argyle's military might and strategic impregnability set him apart from the rest of the Scottish nobility, many of the other elements of his power were familiar to them. Like the remainder of the Lowland aristocracy, Argyle's power rested on the land and jurisdictions which he held and the marriage alliances and bonds which he made. But the earl's position was profoundly strengthened by the power and authority he derived from being the MacCailein Mor: the chief of

¹ The English reasoned that "the great pieces of ordnance of brass which being not wont to be the furniture of a common subject is the more like to have come from some other of greater power than themselves": PRO, SP 51/1 fo 18.

² The earl asked for demi-cannon, cannon and 300 hagbutters: PRO, SP 63/2 fo 58.

the Campbells and the greatest Gaelic lord in Scotland. It was the successful combination of Lowland aristocrat and Gaelic chief which made Argyle's position unique and his power so formidable across half of Scotland.

For Argyle as for other Scottish magnates, land was the principal foundation of noble power. In all matters of tenure and inheritance the Campbells had, from a very early stage, adopted and exploited the feudal forms of Lowland Scotland. They held most of their property directly from the crown by royal charter and themselves granted charters and employed notaries and written documents in many of their dealings. In the middle of the sixteenth century these feudal forms were able to coexist with the traditional Gaelic methods of land tenure and inheritance still practised by some of the clans. It was only at the end of the century and James VI's drive to 'civilise' the Highlands that the lack of a written title to property became so significant and gave the opportunity to clans, such as the Campbells, to employ their own brand of 'aggressive feudalism'. By these means the territorial base of the whole Campbell clan continued its inexorable expansion from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Their growth was like the wild ash, as the Highland proverb vividly expresses it, 'for the ash grows fast and fair, but kills all living things in its shadow'.¹

Argyle's estates were unusual both in their massive size and in their concentration. The crown had permitted and even encouraged the earls to accumulate such a large amount of territory because most of it was situated in the more remote parts of Scotland. Within the Western Highlands Argyle territory covered most of the southern half of the mainland, from Loch Linnhe to the Clyde, through Lorn, Argyll and Cowal. From the original family base on Loch Awe, the senior branch of the Campbells had spread out in all directions. Their estates stretched north into Glen Strae, Glen Orchy and Inishail; into Breadalbane, Strathfillan and Balquhiddy and through Loch Lomond to Boquhan and Balloch. Then they moved along the north of the Clyde by Gare Loch, Lochgoil and encompassing the whole of Cowal, Over-Cowal and down to Bute. Crossing Loch Fyne, Argyle's land stretched south from Loch Awe through Kilmichael into Knapdale and Kintyre as far as Skipness. They covered Lorn, moved through Melfort to Dunstaffnage and on to Lismore and the border of Appin and so back to the northern end of Loch Awe. Outside of this huge central core, the earls also held estates in Ardnamurchan, Moidart, Lochiel and North Uist.

¹ A. Ramsay, *The Arrow of Glenlyon* (London, 1930), 15. For the Campbells as "masters at the art of aggressive feudalism": D. Stevenson, *Alastair MacColla and the Highland Problem* (Edinburgh, 1980), 14; for the use of charters: W. Gillies, "Some Aspects of Campbell History", *TGS* 1 (1976-78), 267-8.

Within the Lowlands Argyle held lands in Perthshire, Fife, Edinburgh, Clackmannanshire, Dunbartonshire and Renfrewshire.¹ The Campbells had done exceptionally well from gifts and leases of ecclesiastical lands around the time of the reformation. The bishops of Brechin and Dunkeld had greatly increased the earls' Lowland holdings, most notably Dunkeld's grant of Castle Campbell and the surrounding estates at Dollar. The generosity of their kinsman, Duncan Campbell, the abbot of Coupar Angus was so great that, as has been commented, 'it is surprising that . . . the whole of the Coupar Angus estates did not simply pass into the hands of the aged abbot's relatives, cadets and branches of the powerful house of Argyll'.² Although most of Argyle's lands were in the Highlands and so less rich agriculturally, their massive extent compensated and placed him alongside the Hamiltons and the Gordons as the three greatest landed magnates in Scotland.

In order to supervise his estates, exercise his personal authority and keep in close contact with his kin and dependents, Argyle moved continually between his numerous residences. These were situated at Inveraray, the main base, Dunoon, Dunstaffnage, Innischannel, Rosneath, Carrick, his new castle at Carnasserie and in the Lowlands at Castle Campbell, with town houses in Edinburgh, Stirling, Perth and possibly Glasgow.³ The earls also frequently visited the other branches of their family, allies and tenants, staying at Ardinglas, Barbreck, Strachur, Inverawe, Kilchurn, Duart and Dunbarton.

From their vast estates the earls acquired much of their wealth. Both for themselves and the crown they collected the various feudal casualties of ward, marriage and relief from the tenants of the area. The rents from their lands came in cash and kind, though pre-

1 The list of lands in the possession of the fifth earl has been compiled from the royal charters which transferred the holdings of the fourth earl to his son [*Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum [RMS]*, edd. J. M. Thomson and others (Edinburgh, 1882–1914), iv, nos. 2811–16] and which in turn passed from the fifth earl to his successor [*RMS*, iv, nos. 2013–18]. Added to these are the lands recorded in *HMC* (4th and 6th report); H. Paton, *The Clan Campbell* (Edinburgh, 1913–22), viii; *Scots Peerage* i, 332–44.

2 M. Sanderson, *Scottish Rural Society in the Sixteenth Century* (Edinburgh 1982), 93. Argyle was also given remission of the thirds on Coupar Abbey: *Thirds of Benefices, 1561–1572*, ed. G. Donaldson, *SHS* (1949), xviii. Expansion into Angus gave the Campbells an important link between the east coast and their empire in the west: E. Cowan, 'The Angus Campbells and the Origin of the Campbell-Ogilvie Feud', *Scottish Studies* (1957–) xxv (1981), 25–38.

3 After the fighting in the Wars of the Congregation the fifth earl felt the need to return to his own 'country' to sort things out: PRO, SP 52/5 fo 113. A new, modern and comfortable castle was built for the fifth earl by John Carswell at Carnasserie: J. Bannerman, 'Two early post-Reformation inscriptions in Argyll', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland [PSAS]*, (1851–), cv (1972–4), 307–12.

dominantly the latter. With so much of their land bordering on lochs or the sea, boats were used to collect the victual rents. Much of the produce was needed to stock the earls' kitchen and maintain their fine reputation for hospitality and generosity. One reason for the peripatetic lifestyle of the earls was the need to consume their rents. Not all the victual and provisions collected from the estates would be consumed and some could be sold for cash.¹ The mills on the estates and the forests of Glenfinglas, Bute and Mamlorn which had been granted to the earls were an additional source of income. However, some of the greatest profits came from the fishing rights. The assise herrings of the 'West Seas' (which ran from the Pentland Firth to the Mull of Galloway, and where the sea flowed within the River Clyde) brought in more than the annual rental of the estate of Rosneath.² Despite the great extent of Argyle's lands there were occasions when cash was needed quickly and in greater quantities than could easily be found in the Highlands. At such times money could be raised by a mortgage or wadset on the lands, as happened in 1569 when the fifth earl used the device apparently to raise cash to pay for his military enterprises.³

As well as granting them estates, the crown had also given the earls of Argyle very extensive jurisdiction over the Western Highlands. This operated at three levels: local, regional and national. The earls' jurisdiction ranged from the numerous separate baronies, such as the newly incorporated barony of Auchnaggarin in Cowal, to the individual regalities, such as Abernethy, and up to the great consolidated regalities which covered most of the region, such as Lorn, Cowal and Over-Cowal.⁴ The legal authority this gave the lord of regality was immense: technically only king's pleas of treason and murder were excluded. In the west where there was virtually no recourse to the Edinburgh courts it was in practice total and the earls of Argyle performed many of the functions of central government, even granting full letters of legitimation on their own authority as lord of the regality.⁵ At this regional level the earl was granted all the offices within the sheriffdom of Argyll; he was the justice in Lorn, Knapdale, and Kintyre; the chamberlain in Bute and the bailie in Kintyre, Uist and Skye. The permanent offices were occasionally supplemented by special commissions, often of fire and sword. It is probable that the fifth earl was made the Lieutenant of the whole

1 Sanderson, *Scottish Rural Society*, 22–30, 32, 38.

2 In 1561 the assise herrings were granted to the nephew of Campbell of Ardkinglas: *HMC* (4th report), 481.

3 A[rgyll] T[ranscripts] (Dept. of Scottish History, University of Glasgow) vi, 136.

4 The jurisdictions were usually listed alongside the lands: see above p. 9 n. 1.

5 *Highland Papers* iv, 216f. There were no sheriff returns by the earls of Argyle from 1528 until the 1570s: G. Hewitt, *Scotland under Morton* (Edinburgh, 1982), 144.

Isles even though there is no central record of this appointment.¹ In addition to the regional jurisdictions which covered nearly the whole of the Western Highlands, Argyle was Justice-General of the whole of Scotland. He was the highest officer of criminal justice in the land and in this capacity he held justice-ayres in the north, the Borders and western Lowlands.²

These extensive jurisdictions were an important addition to Argyle power. The majority were heritable as were the great state offices, such as the master of the royal household, traditionally held by the family. The exercise of justice afforded two advantages to the earls of Argyle. It furnished considerable income through the profits of justice and also, more importantly, gave them legal authority over all the other major clans within the West Highlands. To all intents and purposes Argyle was the crown's legal officer in the west.³

Argyle's lands and jurisdictions gave him control over large areas of the Highlands. However, he did not simply rely upon his own resources but was able to call upon those of his kin. One of the most striking features about the Campbells in the sixteenth century was their loyalty to their chief. This was more remarkable because there were a number of extremely powerful cadet branches, most notably the Campbells of Glenorchy and the Campbells of Cawdor.

Campbell cohesion was the key to their successful expansion as a clan and to the enormous power of the earls of Argyle. By remaining loyal to their chief and being willing to serve him and the interests of the whole clan, the strong cadet branches allowed the entire Campbell clan to operate as a single unit, thereby increasing its strength. Even the so-called 'English' Campbells, based in Ayrshire, still acknowledged the leadership of the earls of Argyle though their geographical separation from the main body of the clan made their interests diverge.⁴ Although severely threatened twice during the sixteenth century this unity did not break and this made the experi-

1 John Carswell in the dedication of his Gaelic Form of Prayers called the earl 'Lieutenant in the bounds of the Hebrides': *Foirm na n-Urrnuidheadh*, R. Thomson (ed.), Scottish Gaelic Text Society, xi (Edinburgh, 1970), 173; the same title is used in a bond of manrent, 'Luiffthennent of the haille Ilis thairof' AT, vi, 67.

2 *TA*, xi, 31, 120, 198. For the office of Justice-General and the terms on which the fifth earl held it: *Stair Society Miscellany* ii, D. Sellar (ed.), (1984), 93-4. As Justice-General Argyle was the presiding judge at the trial of Bothwell: *CSP Scot* ii, 319; and in 1567 used Thomas Craig as his justice-depute: *CSP Scot* ii, 572.

3 E. Cowan, *Montrose* (London, 1977), 53, 90. Problems arose when a plaintiff did not want his case tried by the earl because Argyle was involved, as happened when John Lamont of Inverryne objected to the fourth earl: J. Wormald, *Lords and Men in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1985), 121-5.

4 Hugh Campbell of Loudoun was one of the kin gathered in 1559 to raise money to pay for the earl's trip to France: AT, v, 104; Donaldson, *Queen's Men*, 75, 103.

ence of the Campbells very different from that of most of the other major clans.¹ In particular it provided a sharp contrast to the internecine quarrels which ruined the southern branch of the MacDonalds, Clan Ian Mor. It was also different from the Lowland families such as the Stewarts or the Douglasses which split into separate groups under rival magnates.

This unity itself strengthened Campbell power. The minor cadet branches within the central core of the earls' own territories provided loyal deputies who could carry out the day-to-day running of the area. The Campbells of Auchinbreck and Ardkinglas acted as the earls' second-in-command, while Glenlyon, Lochnell, Barbreck, Skipness, Duntrune and Inverliever all played important roles in the running of Argyle's 'country'. The earls were also well served by their kinsmen who held ecclesiastical benefices in the area, the most important being John, elect of the Isles, commendator of Ardchattan, Nicholas, dean of Lismore, and John, provost of Kilmun, the illegitimate son of the fourth earl.²

As well as strengthening and consolidating the control over the central core of Argyle's lands the Campbell branches extended that dominating influence over a much greater area. The Campbells of Cawdor and Glenorchy were especially important agents of the expansion of Argyle hegemony. By the marriage of Sir John to Lady Muriel at the beginning of the sixteenth century the Campbells of Cawdor had gained the extensive territory of the thanes of Cawdor and from 1524 made their usual residence in the north-east. However, the family still retained their interest in the west particularly the lands around Ardchattan where John Campbell was later prior.³ As baillies for the abbey of Iona the Campbells of Cawdor were also able to acquire more land in the west, such as Muckairn on the shore of Loch Etive and generally to retain and extend their influence on the west coast and in the Isles. The acquisition of Islay at the beginning of the seventeenth century thus continued an established

1 At two stages in the sixteenth century the Campbells were in serious danger of disintegration. The fourth earl seemed to attack some of the Campbell cadet branches: Wormald, *Lords and Men*, Bonds of Friendship, nos. 29, 43. But by far the most serious crisis came during the minority of the seventh earl which led to the murder of Campbell of Cawdor: E. Cowan, 'Clanship, kinship and the Campbell acquisition of Islay', *ante* lviii (1979), 132–57.

2 Both before and to a greater extent after the reformation the earls could rely upon their relatives, kinsmen and dependents within the established church: D. Watt, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* Scottish Record Society N.S.1 (1969), 26–38 and index under Campbells; J. Craven, *Records of the dioceses of Argyll and the Isles 1560–1860* (Kirkwall, 1907), 4–24.

3 The son of Campbell of Cawdor and during the minority of his nephew the Tutor of Cawdor: *The Book of the Thanes of Cawdor [Cawdor Bk]* (Spalding Club, 1859), xxvi, 173–5.

policy of expansion on the west coast, though most of the Cawdor Campbells' lands lay on the opposite side of the country.¹

The progress of the Glenorchy Campbells was even more spectacular. From their castle at Kilchurn at the northern end of Loch Awe, Glenorchy influence had spread steadily eastwards in a broad arc. Their area of control extended from Glen Orchy into Glen Strae and on into Rannoch. It continued through Glen Lochy and Strathfillan to Crianlarich and along Glen Dochart to the new centre of Glenorchy's power on Loch Tay. From the eastern end of Loch Tay and the castle at Balloch (Taymouth) Glenorchy control reached to Aberfeldy and even as far as Perth. Their influence dominated Breadalbane which became the family's territorial designation when it was ennobled in the seventeenth century. To the south of Loch Tay it spread to Loch Earn and throughout Balquhiddy. With the loyal support of all the Campbell cadet branches, the earls of Argyle were placed in an extremely strong position throughout the central and western Highlands. Their family influence stretched from the Clyde to Loch Linnhe and across to Perth with a strong outpost on the Moray Firth.²

III

In addition to those of the Campbell name and clan the earls of Argyle could also look to a wider affinity. The links with this extended group were less powerful and secure but they could be an important additional source of strength. The affinity was created and extended in two basic ways: through marriage alliances and by the use of bonds of friendship and manrent. The links which the earls of Argyle made with their fellow Scottish magnates reveal an interesting pattern. The Campbells made a deliberate effort to integrate themselves into the aristocracy of Lowland Scotland. Without exception the earls used their marriages to ally themselves with the great Lowland families such as the Hamiltons, Gordons and Stewarts. The major Campbell line did not intermarry with other Highland families. This can partly be explained by their lack of social equals

¹ *Cawdor Bk*, xxiii–xxvi, 156–8; Cowan, "Clanship", 132–57. The expansion of the influence of the Cawdor Campbells can also be seen in their bonds: Wormald, *Lords and Men*, Bonds of Manrent under Cawdor. The Campbells of Cawdor made thirty three bonds of manrent with twenty six different families.

² *The Black Book of Taymouth [Taymouth Bk]* (Bannatyne Club, 1855). The bonds made by the Glenorchy Campbells are even more revealing than those of the Cawdor branch of the family. They survive in greater numbers than for any other lord and cover a rather different clientele: Wormald, *Lords and Men*, Bonds of Manrent under Breadalbane. There were 181 bonds of manrent with 120 different families, thirty nine of whom gave their bonds on more than one occasion.

within Scottish Gaeldom, for by the middle of the sixteenth century no other clan was as powerful. Much more important to the Campbells, however, was the way in which their marriage alliances established their political position within Scottish politics and society.

The fifth earl's career illustrates the point. He himself had a royal match, his first wife being Jean Stewart, James V's illegitimate daughter. This made the earl part of Mary queen of Scots' immediate family and encouraged the close friendship which grew up between them.¹ It also linked Argyle with the rest of the king's illegitimate children who were led by his eldest son Lord James Stewart, the earl's close friend and political ally. Argyle's first marriage was not a success and a long period of tension was finally resolved by a divorce, the first ever granted in Scotland for non-adherence or separation.² In the summer of 1573, immediately after the final decree of divorce the earl remarried. His second wife was Jane Cunningham, the daughter of the fiercely protestant earl of Glencairn. Neither marriage produced a legitimate heir, though Argyle sired five illegitimate children.³

Argyle was also closely connected to the great Hamilton family through his mother Helen, the daughter of the first earl of Arran and sister of the Duke of Châtelherault. As the only child from his father's first marriage the fifth earl remained extremely close to his maternal kin throughout his life. It is striking that nearly all of Argyle's major political allies within Scotland were drawn from this most intimate circle of his own family. Despite his estrangement from his first wife the links with the royal branch of the Stewarts remained firm and Argyle's breach with Lord James had other causes.⁴ The earl's association with the Duke of Châtelherault and the rest of the Hamiltons proved remarkably enduring and in the civil war the two men led the queen's party. During the previous great upheavals, the war of the Congregation and the Chaseabout Raid, all of Argyle's close family connexions had held firm and provided leadership. An alliance of Argyle himself, the duke, the earl of Arran his eldest son (until he went mad), and Lord James Stewart led the Lords of the Congregation and the unsuccessful revolt against the Darnley

1 Donaldson, *Queen's Men*, 93. A part (500 marks) of Jean's tocher was provided by her brother Robert, earl of Orkney: P. Anderson, *Robert Stewart, Earl of Orkney, Lord of Shetland 1533–1593* (Edinburgh, 1982), 9.

2 J. Riddell, *Inquiry into the Law and Practice in Scottish Peerages* (Edinburgh, 1842), i, 547–55; Knox and Mary queen of Scots had both made considerable efforts to reconcile the couple: *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland* [Knox, *History*] ed. W. C. Dickinson (Edinburgh, 1949), ii, 73–4.

3 *Scots Peerage*, i, 343.

4 For the reason for the split: Dawson, 'Two Kingdoms', 124–5, 127. It was not the end of the amity as Lord James' widow Agnes Keith married Colin the sixth earl.

marriage. It was only after Mary's abdication that this family group split with Lord James becoming Regent and leading the king's party whilst Argyle and the duke took the part of the queen, Lord James' half-sister. In this sense the civil war in Scotland was an extended family quarrel.¹

Among the wider circle of the fifth earl's family were the Grahams, the earls of Menteith. Margaret Graham was Argyle's step-mother and she had three children: Colin, who succeeded his half-brother as the sixth earl, and two daughters. The link with the Grahams was less important to Argyle politically because the fourth earl of Menteith died in 1565 leaving a minor to succeed and there is some suggestion that even before that date Argyle was helping to control the area of Menteith.²

The pattern which emerges from this analysis of the fifth earl's immediate marriage ties with Lowland families holds good for the Campbells throughout the century. The marriages of Campbell sons, the key matches in the family, were made with the daughters of the Lowland aristocracy with a marked preference being shown for the Stewarts both in the royal and other branches. The resulting links were an important ingredient in the political and religious alliances made by the earls of Argyle. In one of the clearest and most binding ways possible the earls of Argyle demonstrated by these marriages that they were, and wished to remain, an integral part of the national political scene.

Though the earls by no means turned their backs on marriage alliances with the other West Highland chiefs, such links involved either daughters or the junior branches of the family. The one exception to this was the fourth earl's marriage to Catherine MacLean, daughter of Lachlan MacLean of Duart. As she was his third wife and he already had four legitimate children it hardly constituted a serious change of direction. However, even this choice reflected Campbell policy. In the middle of the century both Hector Mor and his son Hector Og MacLean of Duart were extremely close to the earls of Argyle, helping them in their council and with other matters of business. In consequence the fourth earl took a MacLean bride and his daughter Janet was married to Hector Og MacLean younger of Duart in 1557.³ In this way the two clans were allied and until the fifth earl's death worked in harmony.

1 Donaldson, *Queen's Men*, 83–116; Finnie, 'House of Hamilton', 20–21.

2 *Scots Peerage*, i, 339–40; vi, 157; *HMC* (6th report), 623.

3 N. MacLean-Bristol, 'The MacLeans from 1560–1707: A Re-Appraisal', in *The Highlands in the Seventeenth Century* (Inverness Field Club, 1986), 78–81. *RMS* iv, no. 1240; *AT*, v, 79. It is probable that the poem 'An Duanag Ullamh' was written for this occasion: W. Gillies, 'Some Aspects of Campbell History', *TGS* 11 (1976–8), 287–8 n. 7; but the dating is queried by D. Thomson, *Introduction to Gaelic Poetry* (London, 1974), 106–7.

The most important marriage between a West Highland chief and a Campbell woman was that of Agnes Campbell to James MacDonald of Dunyveg and the Glens. Agnes was probably a daughter of Colin, third earl of Argyle, and so the fifth earl's aunt, though more like a sister in age. James was the chief of the southern branch of Clan Donald and was, after Argyle, the most powerful leader in the west.¹ Despite the bitter enmity which arose between the two clans at the end of the sixteenth century, there is no evidence of serious trouble in the earlier period. An alliance between the Campbells and MacDonalds was of obvious advantage to both clans since it prevented any escalation of disputes in the south-western Highlands. This was of particular benefit to James because he was primarily concerned with extending and consolidating his lands in Antrim, though his family also held Kintyre, Islay and Jura. Argyle and MacDonald of Dunyveg worked well together and on James' death in 1565 the earl made considerable efforts to help Agnes and her sons.

Agnes' first marriage in itself ensured that the Campbells would learn more about Ulster and from the mid-century they had displayed a marked interest in events across the North Channel. During the following decades and particularly in the lifetime of the fifth earl, the house of Argyle became increasingly involved in the politics of Irish Gaeldom. This was something of a new departure for them and indicated a widening of their horizons. It was predictable that the earls would become more interested in northern Ireland as they began to assume control in the West Highlands and to don the mantle of the Lords of the Isles. Their influence was extending to include the main recruiting grounds for the vital mercenary trade between the Highlands and Islands and Ireland and by itself this would have brought them into closer contact with the Irish Gaelic chiefs. Once again marriage alliances were the chosen instruments of Argyle expansion. Direct links with Ireland were forged through three women, Catherine MacLean, Agnes Campbell and her daughter Finola MacDonald, all of whom were married to northern Irish Gaelic chiefs.

Catherine MacLean's second husband gave a clear indication of the new direction of Campbell ambitions. She was married to Calvagh O'Donnell thereby cementing the link which already existed between the fifth earl, her stepson, and his close friend and comrade-in-arms, Calvagh. Catherine's subsequent desertion and possible betrayal of Calvagh to his enemy Shane O'Neill was an embarrassment to Argyle and after the death of both O'Donnell and O'Neill

1 G. Hill, *The MacDonnells of Antrim* (Belfast, 1873), 1-118; *Scots Peerage*, i, 338. Agnes was not, as previously argued, the fifth earl's half-sister.

she returned to Scotland and was safely married off to Stewart of Appin, one of the earl's trusted advisers.¹ The most important part of the fifth earl's strategy in Ulster was accomplished through the marriages of Agnes Campbell and her daughter Finola, both of which were negotiated by Argyle himself. A special joint betrothal was arranged in 1568 which involved the two major Gaelic chiefs of northern Ireland, the O'Neill and the O'Donnell. Agnes was married to Turlough Luineach, who had succeeded Shane as the O'Neill. At the same time Finola, Agnes' daughter by James MacDonald, married Hugh, Calvagh's successor as the O'Donnell. Both brides brought with them a large dowry of fighting men to serve their respective Gaelic lords in Ulster.²

Throughout the sixteenth century the earls of Argyle employed marriage alliances to buttress their position within Scotland's national political life and then to gain entry into the world of Irish Gaeldom. They tended to leave the task of consolidating their established hold on Scottish Gaelic society to the marriages made by the Campbell cadet branches. Marriage alliances created formal and lasting links between clans and families some of which endured for generations.

The other principal means of enlarging the affinity was through bonds of manrent.³ Such agreements were voluntary and although normally entered into for life could be ended or changed. They were frequently made to deal with a specific local or national issue. Bonds of manrent fell into two main categories: bonds of friendship between social equals and bonds of manrent proper made between a superior and an inferior. Included within the bonds of friendship are those political and religious agreements which proliferated during the domestic upheavals through which the fifth earl lived. These bonds, which frequently resembled public declarations, were made between large groups of the Scottish nobility and Argyle was a signatory to a number of these famous documents, such as the Hamilton Bond of 8 May 1568.

If these are excluded, however, the earl only made one bond of friendship with a fellow magnate. This was his agreement with Atholl on 24 March 1570 to settle the local disputes and clashes which had arisen between them because their lands and influence were adjacent.⁴ Even this bond, which appears to deal with a straight-

¹ *CSP Scot*, i, 498–9; *CSP Irel*, i, 172, no. 84; Hayes-McCoy, *Scots Mercenaries*, 150–1.

² Hayes-McCoy, *Scots Mercenaries*, 77–121.

³ The following section relies heavily upon the pioneering work of Wormald, *Lords and Men* especially the Appendices which list all the bonds.

⁴ Wormald, *Bonds of Friendship* no. 59. The Atholl men had had the worst of these encounters and were afraid of Argyle's men: Knox, *History*, ii, 154, 157.

forward local dispute, also possesses a wider political significance and was part of Atholl's adherence to the queen's party in 1570. The lack of any other bond of friendship between the fifth earl and a Lowland magnate is particularly striking. The other earls followed a similar pattern with only nine such bonds of friendship throughout the entire period of bonding.¹ The tendency of the Campbell chiefs to ignore these horizontal ties was a measure of the strength and not the weakness of their position. The fifth earl of Argyle, like his predecessors, relied upon his kin and rarely entered into bonds outwith this family circle. The earls looked for help and support from their extended family in their political and religious campaigns: they exploited the links created by their matrimonial strategy rather than the bonds which were more common among the rest of the Scottish nobility. The earls of Argyle chose to integrate themselves into the Lowland aristocracy through this established and close knit family group.

Bonds of manrent made with Lowland lords reveal an identical pattern. The earls of Argyle in general and the fifth earl in particular made singularly few bonds of manrent, and those which were concluded often rested on existing family ties; one such example was Lord Drummond, who renewed his bond on 14 April 1573 because he was 'of Argyll's house' though the relationship was three generations old.² Among Lowland bonds no deliberate policy to increase Campbell control can be glimpsed. Instead they seemed to be much more the product of particular local circumstances or families which required a bond of manrent with the earls of Argyle.

By contrast, the bonds made with Highland chiefs were much more numerous and followed a deliberate pattern. The earls employed bonds of manrent as part of their efforts to maintain and extend their power and influence. Argyle pre-eminence within West Highland society is apparent from the fact that these were not bonds of friendship between equals but bonds of manrent between a superior and an inferior. Such bonds again tended to be the product of particular circumstances and thus represented the specific needs of the different Highland chiefs. This can be illustrated by the activities of the fifth earl who, for example, made a series of bonds in relation to the settlement of the inheritance of Mary MacLeod.³

1 Wormald, Bonds of Friendship nos. 39, 40, 41, 44, 50, 64, 66, 67, 70, with the earls of Angus; Glencairn; Huntly; Mar; Montrose; Morton; Lord Boyd of Kilmarnock and the bishop of the Isles.

2 Wormald, Arg.Bond (of Manrent) no. 48: *Scots Peerage*, vii, 43, 47. The distance of the relationship did not lessen Argyle's anger when his kinsman did not come to meet him in June 1560 as promised: *GSP Scot*, i, 421.

3 I. F. Grant, *The MacLeods: The History of a Clan 1200-1956* (London, 1959), 97-131; *Collectanea de Rebus Albencicis*, (Iona Club, 1847), i, 91-2, 137-50; Wormald, Arg.Bond nos. 34, 35, 38, 44.

Within the group who gave their bonds to the fifth earl were most of the leading Highland chiefs and all of any importance in the southern part of the Western Highlands. The three major representatives of the MacDonald clan, James MacDonald of Dunyveg (Argyle's relative by marriage), Donald MacDonald of Sleat and John Macalastair, the Captain of Clanranald, were all bondsmen of Argyle. Not surprisingly Hector MacLean of Duart, another relative by marriage, was also attached to the earl along with MacLean of Ardlung and MacLeod of Dunvegan. The slightly lesser chiefs, MacLauchlan of that ilk and MacGregor of Glenstrae were contracted to Argyle in addition to three smaller clans in their entirety.¹

The fifth earl's bonds corresponded to the established practice of the house of Argyle. Very few bonds were concluded with Lowland lords and instead the earls concentrated on subordinating the main Highland chiefs through bonds of manrent. Their bondsmen included—in addition to the important clan chiefs already mentioned under the fifth earl—the Captains of Clan Cameron and Clan Chattan (Mackintosh) and the Macalastairs of Glengarry and Morar (part of the Clan Donald). In taking bonds all the earls of Argyle restricted themselves to the top levels of Highland society, leaving the Campbells of Cawdor and Glenorchy to make bonds with the lower levels. In this way the vast majority of Highland society, especially in the south, was brought under Campbell influence.²

The earl's own bonds were not the only such testimony to his power. Equally impressive and in some ways more revealing were the number of occasions on which allegiance to Argyle was made an exception in the bonds concluded by members of his affinity with

1 Bonds with fifth earl: Boyd of Penkill; Lord Drummond; Clan Fergus; MacAlastair of Clanranald; MacDonald of Dunyveg; MacDonald of Sleat; MacGregor of Glenstrae; Clan Tyre; Clan Lauren [MacLaren]; MacLauchlan of that ilk; MacLean of Ardlung [probably Allan MacLean of Gigha {Ailean nan Sop} and his son Hector but possibly the Macleans of Ardgour: A. M. Sinclair, *The Clan Gillean* (Charlottetown, 1899), 307, 431–2.]; MacLean of Duart; MacLeod of Dunvegan; O'Donnell of Tyrconnell; Stewart of Ambrismoir; Stewart of Bute; Campbell of Glenorchy and other Campbells in a special bond Arg.Bond no. 39. In total the fifth earl made twenty two bonds with seventeen different families which added to those undertaken by the other earls made a grand total of ninety seven bonds with fifty one families or individuals.

2 An analysis has been made of the bonds of friendship and manrent undertaken by the earls of Argyle, Campbells of Cawdor and Glenorchy. They reveal that there was a conscious policy of dividing the Highlands into separate areas of influence for the different branches of the Campbell clan. The divisions were both geographical, corresponding to the respective territorial strengths of the Campbells and also social, splitting Highland society between the earls, who only dealt with the topmost layer, and the cadet branches, who ranged far more widely. The total number of bonds of manrent involved was 311 (earls ninety seven; Glenorchy 181 and Cawdor thirty three). There was remarkably little overlap between the three groups apart from those who made their bonds with either Cawdor or Glenorchy and then excepted their allegiance to the earls.

other chiefs and lords. This was the case not simply among the Campbell kin, where it might be expected, but also for thirty-five other families. In making his bond in 1572 with Hugh Fraser of Lovat, a man such as John Macalastair, Captain of Clanranald, was careful to except his allegiance to the fifth earl so that he could not be asked by his new lord to act in any way contrary to Argyle's interest. This practice provides an interesting check on the extent of the Campbell affinity for it reveals thirty six families for whom there is no record of a bond of manrent with the earls of Argyle, and yet in their other bonds these families except allegiance to Argyle.¹ Clearly the group of Highlanders who 'looked to' Argyle was considerably greater than those for whom bonds have survived. What these bonds and especially the allegiances confirm was the general leadership of the west by the earls of Argyle. The supremacy enjoyed by the fifth earl was almost regal and the chiefs of the Highlands were as careful not to offend him as they were not to insult the crown itself.

The evidence from the bonds of the nature and membership of Argyle's affinity can be confirmed and supplemented by the lists of Argyle's 'allies' to be found in the Gaelic poetry. It was conventional in the praise poems of the period to list those clans who were regarded as supporters and allies of the panegyric's recipient. In the poems addressed to the earls of Argyle the following clans were named: the MacDonalds, both North and South; the Islesmen; the MacLeans; the MacLeods; the MacNeills; the MacKinnons and in Ireland O'Donnell of Tyrconnell and probably O'Neill of Tyrone. This list shows a remarkable similarity to that which emerges from the bonds of manrent.²

IV

By the middle of the sixteenth century Campbell leadership and influence had filled the vacuum created by the suppression of the Lordship of the Isles in 1493. This was so at all levels, cultural and intellectual as well as political and military. Argyle ascendancy was accepted by most of the other major chiefs of the west including the previously all-powerful MacDonalds. However, since it ultimately depended upon the personal qualities of the earls and upon the respect which they could inspire, it was by definition transitory and had to be continually reinforced.

¹ There were twelve Campbell and twenty four other families in this group.

² The allies were listed in two poems 'Maith an chairt' printed in W. Watson, 'Classic Gaelic Poetry of Panegyric in Scotland', *TGSI* xxix (1914-9), App.1, 217-22; and 'An Duanag Ullamh' [see above p. 4 n. 3]; J. MacInnes, 'The Panegyric Code in Gaelic Poetry and its Historical Background', *TGSI* 1 (1976-8), 448f.

The most important component in Argyle's leadership was the maintenance of his style as a Gaelic chief. By tradition Gaeldom's leaders were expected to keep a court where the Gaelic 'learned orders' were generously maintained and hospitality was freely given to all. As well as being a good patron, generous and hospitable a chief was also expected to be a brave and cunning leader of his men in battle. These were the two main virtues traditionally admired within Gaelic society and celebrated in the poetry.

Although he could also assume the part of the Lowland magnate and British politician, the fifth earl was first and foremost MacCaillein Mor and he deliberately cultivated this role and strove to conform to the ideal of a Gaelic chief. Argyle was praised as the 'King of the Gael, the man who maintains the thronged court, prosperous and wealthy'.¹ When in his 'country' Argyle lived in the Gaelic manner and entertained on a lavish scale.

Indeed his hospitality was rated second only to that of MacDonald of Glengarry by one bard.² An important element within Argyle's court were the poets, bards, sennachies and physicians whom the earl supported and maintained. Throughout the sixteenth century the Campbells had been increasing their patronage of the Gaelic learned orders and the family was slowly assuming the position previously held by the MacGregors of Glenstrae.³ The MacEwan family provided the earls of Argyle with poets, bards and sennachies as well as running a full bardic school. Visits by other poets of the ollamh grade proves that the MacEwans were of this highest bardic grade as well. It also shows that Argyle's court was on the Gaelic 'circuit' and frequently entertained other Irish and Scottish poets. The earls also maintained a family of physicians, first the O'Conchobhairs and later the MacLachlans.⁴

1 'An Duanag' BG, lines 6867-70: Gillies, 'Campbell History', 260. The joys of MacCaillein's household were also celebrated by another bard who declared that no-one who visited wished to leave: Watson, 'Classic Gaelic Poetry', 199-200: D. Thomson, 'Gaelic Learned Orders and Literati in Medieval Scotland', *Scottish Studies*, xii (1968), 57-78.

2 Gillies, 'Campbell History', 263. The infamous Angus of the Satires also had something to say about the hospitality of the Campbell households he visited during his Scottish tour: Watson, 'Classic Gaelic Poetry', 201.

3 I am grateful to Professor Gillies for this suggestion. Even at the time of the Book of the Dean of Lismore the Campbells were considered knowledgeable and cultured patrons and several poems were ascribed to the Campbell aristocracy themselves: Gillies, 'Campbell History', 259.

4 Watson, 'Classic Gaelic Poetry', 196-205: J. Bannerman, 'Lordship of the Isles', in *Scotland in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. J. Brown, (London, 1977), 234. On the MacEwans: A. Matheson, in *Foirm*, App.2, 183-6. Also J. Bannerman, 'Literacy in the Highlands' in *The Renaissance and Reformation in Scotland*, I. B. Cowan and D. Shaw (edd.), (Edinburgh, 1982), 214-35. For the Gaelic medical tradition and the O'Conchobhairs in particular: J. Bannerman, *The Beatoins: a medical kindred in the classical Gaelic tradition* (Edinburgh, 1986), 125, 144-9.

One of the most important functions of the poets and bards of Argyle's court was to praise their patron and proclaim the earl's new position to the rest of the Gaelic world. This was done in two principal ways: through panegyric poems and by the presentation and manufacture of the pedigrees of the Campbells by the sennachies. In the predominantly oral culture of Scottish Gaeldom the images projected by the poets were of the utmost importance. Their vivid pictures of the different clans and chiefs dominated popular perceptions and then became fixed by tradition into conventional portraits. In this way the reputation of a great chief or his clan could be made, or marred, for ever. The potency of the bardic images created in the seventeenth century can still be felt. Within Gaeldom today the attitude towards the Campbells remains deeply antagonistic and this is partly due to the effectiveness of the MacDonald propaganda created by their poets.¹

The panegyric poems praising the earls of Argyle were composed both by their own poets, the MacEwans, and by visiting bards who addressed themselves directly to the earls. The highly stylised forms and conventions of the praise poems were used to convey the status and aspirations of the Campbells. Through this medium their pretensions circulated throughout the Gaelic world. When the poet announced that the earl of Argyle was 'lord of the Gael' he was making the unequivocal claim that the Campbells had replaced the MacDonalds and were in effect the new Lords of the Isles. At the same time the poet also expressed the rather different position which the Campbells held because as well as having 'the charter of the headship of the Gael' Argyle also ruled over 'Galls' (non-Gaels). The bards' use of the term 'Alba', rather than simply Gaeldom, to describe the geographical extent of Argyle's power reveals an awareness of the broader Scottish and even British context of Campbell authority. Though this wider dimension was crucial for the Campbells, it was of secondary importance to the other Gaels and this is reflected in the poetry written for them as well as in their political outlook.²

The pedigrees worked out by the sennachies and proclaimed on important occasions had a similar propaganda purpose. They were used to establish a claim to the leading position in Gaelic society. The unusual thing about the ancestors attributed to the Campbells

¹ Gillies, 'Campbell History', 264–76; J. MacInnes, 'Gaelic Poetry and Historical Tradition', in *The Middle Ages in the Highlands* (Inverness Field Club, 1981), 142–63.

² MacInnes, 'Panegyric Code', 442–4. The poems which expressed these sentiments were 'Maith an chairt' (see above p. 15 n. 3); 'An Duanag Ullamh' (see above p. 4 n. 3) and 'Duall ollamh do triall le toisg' not printed (NLS MS 72.2.2 and *Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts* J. MacKechnie (ed.), (Boston, Mass, 1973), i, 209–11, items 10, 13). Though written later for the Marquis of Argyle the poem, 'Triath na nGaoidheal', provided the best summary of Campbell ambitions and their British perspective, printed in *SGS*, iii (1931). 143–51.

is their variety and diversity. There was no attempt to secure entrance into the highest flight of Irish Gaelic lineage, the Milesian genealogies, though by tracing descent from Fergus Leithderg the son of Nemed the Campbells were incorporated into the world of the professional Irish Genealogies. The old and probably authentic name of the Campbells as Clan Duibne or O'Duibne later led to the popular association with the Feinian folk hero, Diarmid O'Duibne. Together these ancestors provided an adequate, if not exceptional, Gaelic pedigree. But the main progenitor who was brought into the Campbell genealogies was also the most surprising: no less a figure than King Arthur. Such a claim emphasised the British connexion by stating that the Campbells descended from the king and his son Mervie/Smervie or Myrddin. This demonstrated the different outlook of the Campbells and the way in which they both operated with much wider horizons and entertained far greater ambitions than was normal within the Gaelic world. The other line of descent claimed for the Campbells was Norman French. This was derived from the English spelling of their name 'Campbell' and to play down the Gaelic 'cam beul' or 'twisted mouth'. Campbell was then equated with De Campo Bello or De Beauchamp and a full Norman and French ancestry. The variety and geographical spread, together with the combination of Gaelic with non-Gaelic ancestors found in the Campbell pedigrees, testify to the extent of Argyle interests and political ambitions. Like their presumed ancestors the earls felt equally at home in the Gaelic worlds of Scotland and Ireland, and the international arena of Britain and Europe!¹

As well as supporting the traditional learned orders the fifth earl of Argyle patronised the exciting new project of translating the Protestant 'Form of Prayers' into Gaelic: here his personal faith combined with his position as MacCailein Mor. This task was undertaken by John Carswell who had acted as personal chaplain to the earl and after 1560 was made superintendent of the territory of Argyll. The translation was published in 1567 and was the first book to be printed in Gaelic. In their efforts to spread the Reformed faith within the earl's territories and as far as they were able throughout the Highlands, Carswell and his fellow ministers were deeply indebted to the fifth earl and his firm commitment to protestantism. Without his patronage and encouragement their work would have been extremely difficult.²

¹ W. Sellar, 'The Earliest Campbells: Norman, Briton or Gael?', *Scottish Studies*, xvii (1973), 109–25; Gillies, 'Campbell History', 276–85; D. Sellar, 'Highland Family Origins—Pedigree Making and Pedigree Faking', in *The Middle Ages in the Highlands* (Inverness Field Club, 1981), 103–16.

² The religious situation in the Highlands has not been dealt with in this article because it has been admirably covered by J. Kirk, 'The Jacobean Church in the Highlands', in *The Seventeenth Century in the Highlands* (Inverness Field Club, 1986), 24–51 and 'The Kirk and the Highlands at the Reformation', *Northern Scotland* vii (1986), 1–22; D. Meek and J. Kirk, 'John Carswell, Superintendent of Argyll: a reassessment', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* (1923–), xix, (1975), 1–22.

Argyle's court also contained the considerable personal following of the fifth earl. Several of the leading Campbell cadets served their chief on a daily basis, such as John Campbell of Skipinch and Donald Campbell of Auchinwilling. When greater ceremony was called for as many as half of the barons and landed men of the earl's territories would convey him to the Lowlands.¹ Living with the earl as part of his family were the sons of many of the Highlands chiefs, such as Argyle's nephew, young Lachlan Mor, the son of Hector MacLean of Duart.² The sons of the earls of Argyle were themselves fostered with one of the senior Campbell cadets.³ Foster parents and brothers were a recognised and important part of a man's kin and the relationship carried serious and, at times, onerous obligations for both parties. The Gaelic practice of fostering children remained strong and helped to cement ties of friendship and kinship between different clans and between the various branches of a large clan, such as the Campbells. As well as a large human following the earl was keen to maintain a good supply of horses at his court. He employed a master stabler and sent into England for licences to import horses.⁴ These were not simply for display as the earl and his chief gentlemen would be mounted in battle and travelled extensively on horseback.

The size, splendour and cultural achievements of Argyle's court were extremely important especially in an age when display was itself equated with success. However, the real measure of the earl's leadership of the west and the acceptance of that supremacy by the other chiefs lay in the activities of Argyle's council. Although it was by no means the formal body which had existed under the Lords of the Isles it performed the same function. With the aid of his council and close friends the earl arbitrated the main disputes which divided the Western Highlands. As the fifth earl was in most instances the 'lord' of both plaintiffs he was not usually attempting to support one or other party. He sought to act impartially and to promote a reconciliation which, of course, would also be in his own best interest: it was fatal to have feuding groups within the same affinity.

In one notable case Argyle managed to prevent an inheritance problem from becoming a full-scale feud which would have split the Western Highlands. The story of Mary MacLeod's inheritance and marriage is well known. It demonstrated the considerable political skill of the fifth earl in devising a solution which would satisfy all the

1 AT, vi, 136.

2 MacLean-Bristol, 'The MacLeans', 79. In October 1559 during a mutiny of the troops of the Lords of the Congregation one of the children of Argyle's chamber was killed which nearly caused a major fracas: Knox, *History*, i, 257.

3 In 1633 the Marquis of Argyle fostered his own son with the Campbells of Glenorchy: *Taymouth Bk*, xviii–xxiv.

4 Paton, *Clan Campbell*, viii, 64; *CSP Scot*, iv, 544–5.

major parties, in ensuring that they would all accept it and in using bonds with the rival chiefs to underpin the settlement. In contrast to other Campbell dealings with heiresses the earl resisted the temptation to use his right to the wardship and marriage of Mary MacLeod to gain the lands of her inheritance for the Campbells. In this judicial role the earl did not always secure a successful outcome or bring the dispute and feud to an end. He was unable to halt the long and bitter dispute between the MacLeans and the MacDonalds of Dunyveg over the Rhinns of Islay though he made several valiant attempts to do so. But the royal privy council was frequently as unsuccessful and the very fact that other independent chiefs were prepared to allow Argyle to arbitrate is more important than the earl's failures.¹

Argyle and his council were not only concerned with the major problems of the west. They also dealt with the running of the Campbell lands and in particular with the raising of money in emergencies, such as for the support of the queen's cause in the civil war. Their solution to this difficulty was the unusual expedient of taxing themselves. There are records of two instances when the Campbells agreed to tax or stent on behalf of their chiefs, and the smoothness of the operations suggest that there must have been other such occasions.² The ease with which these taxes were agreed and organized reveals a considerable degree of sophistication, at the very least within the Campbell territories, and probably throughout the Highlands. The most surprising element is, however, the self-confident assumption by the Campbells and their chief that they could take upon themselves one of the main attributes of an independent government: the right to raise taxes.

At both levels, regional disputes and internal Campbell business, the council appears to have worked smoothly and efficiently because the earl was careful to consult his kinsmen and allies seeking 'the advise of his counsall and friendis convenit heir presentlie'. Particularly in the wider sphere of influence in the Western Highlands Argyle's control depended upon this willingness to consult the other chiefs and to act impartially. His authority rested upon the respect which he achieved rather than upon overwhelming dominance. In a world where the character of a chief and his qualities of leadership were of immense importance, the authority was necessarily personal.

1 For the Council of the Lords of the Isles: Bannerman, 'Lordship', 221-8; *Acts of the Lords of the Isles*, xlvii-1. Argyle's Council: AT, v, 104; vi, 67, 78, 136, 150. A grand reconciliation was attempted in the summer of 1568 with Argyle bringing together MacDonald of Dunyveg, MacLean, MacLeod, MacDonald of Sleat, and Moidart: *CSP Scot*, ii, 453-4.

2 The first stent was agreed on 9 February 1559 to help Argyle travel to France to see the Queen; the rate was 20s per merkland without exception: AT, v, 104. The second was 12 August 1569 2 marks of the markland: AT, vi, 136.

Rigid adherence to the Lowland convention of primogeniture deprived the earls of the advantages (and of course the disadvantages) of the more flexible methods of inheritance still practised by many of the other Highland clans. Consequently, most of the other Gaelic chiefs had already proved their abilities in order to attain the leadership of their clan.¹ This means that it was no simple task to dominate West Highland society by force of personality. In the fifth earl the Campbells were led by an extremely able man who could utilize the inherent power of his position to the full. His father and his brother, the fourth and sixth earls, were far less impressive characters and the fortunes of the whole Campbell clan suffered in consequence.²

The respect enjoyed by the fifth earl would not have endured if it had not first been established on the battlefield. MacCailein Mor was first and foremost the leader of the Gaelic host in battle, and Argyle clearly conformed to this ideal. His personal bravery and ability as a commander are clear. The only blemish upon his military record was his fainting fit at Langside when he led the queen's forces. Although his enemies suggested that this was brought on by cowardice there was nothing in his past record to support such a view. On the battlefield at Langside Argyle, in his position as commander of the whole army, was in a relatively safe place. On this occasion he was far less exposed to danger than during the wars of the Congregation when he had personally led his troops in several tight situations, such as the retreat from Edinburgh in which he and his Highlanders recaptured the Leith Wynd and averted a rout. His ability to manage men in a crisis was demonstrated when some of the Congregation's soldiers had mutinied for lack of pay and attacked the Highlanders killing one of the children of Argyle's chamber. As Knox records Argyle 'behaved himself so moderately, and was so studious to pacify the tumult, that many wondered as well of his prudent counsel and stoutness, as of the great obedience of his company'.³

1 The sixteenth century was a period of transition from the old patterns of choosing the clan chief from the best man within the chief's close kindred to the primogeniture of the Lowlands and beloved of the Scottish crown: Bannerman, 'Lordship', 225–6; cf. G. Hayes-McCoy, 'Gaelic Society in Ireland in the late sixteenth century', *Historical Studies* iv (1963), 45–61. Both the MacLeods and the MacLeans suffered from disputed successions in this period and the disintegration of Clan Ian Mor owed much to the rivalries between the brothers and sons of James MacDonald of Dunyveg after his death. Although the earls followed primogeniture not all the Campbell cadets did so, for example the Barbreck Campbells passed over an elder son. I am grateful to Alastair Campbell for this observation.

2 For the incompetence of the fourth earl: Wormald, *Lords and Men*, 108, 121–5. The sixth earl was a stronger man than his father but, according to one opinion, 'weak in judgement and overmuch led by his wife!' *Estimate of the Scottish Nobility* C. Rogers (ed.), (Grampian Club, 1873), 35.

3 Knox, *History*, i, 257, 260.

The importance to a Gaelic chief of a reputation for personal valour meant that it was necessary for the heir to establish his own military credentials at an early stage. It was probably with this purpose in mind that the fifth earl had been sent by his father to fight in Tyrconnell with Calvagh O'Donnell. Their exploits could then be celebrated and so circulated by the bards of both countries. By conforming in this way to the ideal of the warrior chief the future earl of Argyle would enhance his own reputation and encourage the loyalty and respect he received from the other chiefs. It would make it easier to gather allies in the future. The devastating effect upon a chief's position both within his own clan and the whole of Highland society of being labelled a coward and deserter of one's clan can be seen after Montrose's victories over the Marquis of Argyle in 1645–6. The Campbell chief never recovered his military reputation in the Highlands and his humiliation at the hands of MacColla was of much greater significance than any strategic gains made by the Royalists.¹

The basic military might of the earl and the Campbells was always present, although the fifth earl kept it in the background and instead preferred negotiation and consultation with the other chiefs. The unusual feature is not the existence of such military power—it would have been impossible to operate within Gaeldom or Scotland without it—but that the earl rarely used physical force to increase Campbell territory or to coerce the other chiefs within the Western Highlands.

The combination of vast territorial holdings, the bonds of kin, friendship and manrent and the informal ties of loyalty gave to the earls of Argyle a dominant position in the west. Although the scale was impressive this did not in itself set Argyle apart from his fellow magnates. What made him unique were his authority as MacCaillein Mor and the fact that he was at the apex of a Gaelic as well as Scottish social order. The very nature of Gaelic society, which was designed to support the warriors of the clan, meant that the authority of a chief could be translated into fighting men with the greatest possible ease. It followed that the pre-eminent chief of the west (as the Lords of the Isles had been) owned an overwhelming asset: he had at his disposal a large reservoir of fighting men. The military might which this brought Argyle has already been demonstrated and placed him in a unique military position within the British Isles. It was the earl's ability to live in both worlds, Gaelic and Scottish, which set Argyle apart from his contemporaries. But it was the strength given him as Gaelic chief which made the crucial difference and prevented the Scottish king and queen attacking him. It was as MacCaillein Mor that he was impregnable, not as the earl of Argyle!

1 Cowan, *Montrose*, 173–91; Stevenson, *MacColla*, 145–244.